

PERSONALITY TYPING AND LEADERSHIP

by

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The Strategic Leadership style highlighted in LAMS curriculum is typically very effective since different styles of leadership may be more appropriate for certain types of decision making and people involved. But one very important difference among people that is often overlooked is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality type {Note: Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® and MBTI® are registered trademarks of Consulting Psychologists Press (CPP)}.

There are 16 MBTIs, each with its own potential strengths and weaknesses, and we all fall into one (see chart). The personality type consists of four letters, each representing how we interact and perceive the world around us. The resulting MBTI can serve to provide insights into one's own communication, relationship and leadership preferences as well as those of others. Once you know your own type and that of another person's, you can leverage a variety of literature to determine approaches most likely to result in a successful professional relationship. This technique is covered during the five-day Coast Guard Senior Leadership and Skills School.

Although there are 16 MBTIs, the military population is not equally divided among them. For example, four of the 16 (25%) MBTIs are described as "Sensing and Judging (SJ)" but studies indicate that 50% junior officers in the U.S. military have SJ personality types. SJs tend to gravitate to and thrive in a military career since they are naturally inclined to be meticulous, thorough, timely, by-the-book, serious, factual, organized, common sense-centered, reliable, goal-oriented, high-energy, professionally dressed, security-seeking, and down-to-earth. Your stereotypical XO/XPO afloat. But while many of these attributes would assist a Guardian early in their career, they can become a

liability later on when vision, adaptability, imagination, and big picture thinking are required.

The opposite personality type of SJs are NPs – “iNtuition and Perceiving.” People with NP are less serious, prefer a slower pace, liable to not finish projects, disorganized, less professional in appearance, find rules and structure limiting and tend to procrastinate. Although this seems to describe someone destined to fail in the military, NPs possess qualities of vital importance to senior decision makers, including creativity, ability to envision the future, knack for big-picture thinking, and are imaginative. If it weren’t for NPs high in our organization, we likely wouldn’t be pursuing modernization.

So does our MBTI give SJs the excuse not to be visionary and our NPs to be sloppy in appearance? Not at all. Our MBTI is simply our natural preference – we can go against it if we make a conscious effort to. For example, if the XO/XPO of a cutter was a SJ and the CO/OinC was a NP, their natural tendencies would likely result in a very productive relationship. But what if it were the opposite – the XO/XPO was a NP not big on details, professional appearances, nor finishing projects, but the CO/OinC was? And the CO, being an SJ, was too focused on details to engage in big-picture vision? While this may sound like a train wreck waiting to happen, if each had insights into his/her own MBTI and worked against it, the relationship could very easily work. But not having insights into your own MBTI and that of others can negate any other leadership expertise you may have.

The LDC has MBTI evaluators on staff who can administer the “instrument” (it isn’t technically an exam) to your entire unit. Doing so for yourself and your subordinates seems like an easy way to potentially vastly improve your leadership and

mentoring, but privacy is an issue. MBTI results are a psychological assessment and as such can only be shared by someone if they are freely willing to do so. MBTI results also have nothing to do with skill, ability, or intelligence and cannot ethically be used to hire, fire, or promote people. However, the MBTI types are fairly easy to discern among people you know well, and books such as *The Art of Speed Reading People* can help. In addition, the personality types of all of one's subordinates can be averaged out into a "Team Profile" which avoids privacy issues and is still effective since groups tend to work within the behavioral structure of their group type. The Team Profile also provides advice to the leader regarding communication and problem solving best practices for the given personality type.

Overcoming our personality preferences takes some work but can have profound results and allows the leader to implement a leadership style that is truly situational. For example, in the movie *Twelve O'Clock High*, a staple of LAMS, Brigadier General Frank Savage knew he was going to have to implement a much stricter and formalized atmosphere to improve operational effectiveness. This would come easy for someone with a "Thinking (T)" MBTI.

However, based on his interactions prior to taking command, he seems to be a "Feeler (F)" with a warm and friendly demeanor, sensitive to other's feelings, gentle, diplomatic, and uses people's first names. While he did an excellent job overcoming his preferences it clearly wasn't easy, and he often heavily smoked or consumed liquor before and after chewing people out. And by the end of the movie he breaks under the stress and reverts back to being an F.

Clearly, going against your MBTI isn't easy, but is necessary as you and your mentees progress throughout your careers.

The 16 Types – Brief Descriptions

ENTJ

ENTJs tend to be take-charge types who make their presence known. Usually friendly and outgoing, ENTJs have a lot of energy, often speaking, thinking and moving quickly. Excellent strategic thinkers, they grasp new concepts quickly, even complicated or complex issues. They generally convey confidence, but may sometimes seem brusque or overpowering. ENTJs often juggle several projects at once, and pride themselves on completing them all with skill and efficiency. Creative and innovative, most ENTJs enjoy developing high-level strategy and leading a team or organization towards implementation.

ENFJ

Vivacious, warm, compassionate, and articulate, ENFJs are among the most skillful communicators. Tactful and diplomatic, they are patient listeners and have a rare gift for making personal connections. ENFJs are often quite sensitive and easily offended. They use verbal and nonverbal language to express their opinions and often show approval or disapproval on their faces. ENFJs are concerned with global issues, exceptionally attuned to others' needs and passionate about finding creative solutions to help people in long-term ways. They are happiest when they have a plan and can work cooperatively with others to realize their goals.

INTJ

INTJs tend to be exceptionally innovative, strategic, long-range thinkers who pursue excellence and strive for perfection in all their endeavors. Their strong need for autonomy and achievement – and their faith in their own original ideas – drives them to reach their goals. Highly logical and astute, INTJs are quick to see the implications of new ideas and products, and will work hard to see their ideas translated into real-world results. They may set unrealistically high standards, and push other people almost as hard as they push themselves. Not particularly bothered by indifference or criticism, INTJs are among the most independent of all the types, and have a tendency to do things alone – without necessarily seeking input from others.

INFJ

INFJs are sensitive, committed, hardworking, and perceptive people with deep feelings, integrity and strong convictions. They are often excellent listeners, skilled at generating enlightened and creative solutions to people's problems. Thoughtful and careful decision makers, INFJs need plenty of time to let ideas "percolate" before taking action. INFJs are often perfectionistic, highly focused, and driven to accomplish their goals. Rather formal and reserved, INFJs can be difficult to read, but it is critically important to them that their values, needs and concerns are understood and respected. INFJs are least receptive to people who seem insensitive, impatient, dismissive, sarcastic, pushy, or patronizing.

ENTP

ENTPs love excitement and challenge. They tend to be enthusiastic, talkative, clever, good at many things and constantly striving to acquire additional competencies. ENTPs are intrigued by novel ideas and drawn to new possibilities. They value their inspiration above all else and strive to turn their ideas into reality. Alert and outspoken, they easily see flaws in arguments and often enjoy taking the other side of an issue. Most ENTPs like to test limits and believe that rules are meant to be bent (if not broken). While they often inspire others to get involved in their projects, they may be weak on follow-through. They may also be unrealistic about what can be accomplished in a given time-frame.

ENFP

Curious, energetic, adaptable, and creative, ENFPs like considering unconventional approaches. They enjoy batting around ideas and finding creative solutions and are energized and intrigued by new possibilities and anything out of the ordinary. ENFPs tend to be talkative, enthusiastic, playful, and generally fun-loving people. Warm and caring, ENFPs have strong personal values upon which they base most decisions. Conversations with ENFPs can be very circular as they excitedly move from one topic to the next, making connections and associations. Unconventional and occasionally irreverent, they pride themselves on their uniqueness and originality.

INTP

Intensely intellectual and logical, INTPs are conceptual problem solvers and often show flashes of creative brilliance. Rather skeptical by nature, they are convinced almost exclusively by logical reasoning. They set high standards – for themselves and for others. INTPs think in extremely complex ways and are generally better at organizing new concepts and ideas than at organizing other people. Highly independent, INTPs tend to be more interested in finding creative solutions to problems than implementing them. Often reticent, they are more likely to express their concerns than their appreciation, and may be impatient with details.

INFP

INFPs are extremely perceptive about people. INFPs value their uniqueness and typically seek unconventional ways of doing things. INFPs are driven by their deep personal values and are passionately committed to making sure their beliefs and actions are congruent. Sensitive and empathetic, INFPs tend to be exceptionally adept at reading between the lines. While they may initially appear reserved and rather cool, INFPs are warm and committed to the people and things they care deeply about. Feeling truly understood and respected for their unique perspective and strong values is important for many INFPs.

FIGURE 1.

The 16 Types – Brief Descriptions

ESTJ

ESTJs are practical, realistic, talkative, and highly analytical. They have a no-nonsense approach to life and they live by a code that includes working hard and behaving honorably. While outgoing and friendly, ESTJs prefer to be in control, are strong-willed and very verbal. Logical and analytical, they are practical and pay close attention to details. Traditional and often risk-averse, they prefer to stick with familiar and tested products. ESTJs are rarely convinced by anything other than hard facts and logical reasoning. They tend to decide quickly, sometimes without collecting enough information.

ESFP

ESFPs are charismatic, flexible, spontaneous, down-to-earth, talkative, fun-loving, "people people" who enjoy helping others in tangible ways and are gifted at building excitement & enthusiasm. Sometimes impulsive, ESFPs are most comfortable making their decisions by relying on their personal values. ESFPs have an uncanny ability to notice & remember conversations, facts & details (particularly those that relate to people). ESFPs are excellent at speaking "off the cuff." Naturally sensitive to the feelings of others, ESFPs go out of their way to avoid conflict and may make commitments they can't keep in order to avoid conflict.

ISTJ

Meticulous and thorough, ISTJs are known for their exceptional ability to notice and remember details and facts. They are often described as serious, focused, down-to-earth and supremely reliable people who offer a consistently realistic and practical perspective. ISTJs typically communicate in a style that is clear, direct, and businesslike. ISTJs typically prefer to be given all relevant details, hard facts and specifics in a straightforward and logical manner. They highly value common sense and first-hand experience. ISTJs are often unsettled by spontaneous interruptions or last minute changes to plans and can be resistant to new, unfamiliar ideas or procedures.

ISFP

Gentle, sensitive, easy going, calm and soft-spoken, ISFPs are the most unassuming and down-to-earth of all the 16 types. Typically people of few words, ISFPs are intensely private people who can take a long time to get to know. While ISFPs may appear cool and detached, they are actually very sensitive and nurturing people who are run by their own set of personal values. They care deeply about what others think, are quite trusting, and can very easily have their feelings hurt. Observant and curious, ISFPs see the best in people and have a strong desire to maintain harmony and please others. They have a difficult time directly saying "no", and may fail to mention their concerns or tell you what you want to hear in order to put off a tense moment.

ESFJ

ESFJs are perhaps the most friendly and talkative "people" people of the 16 types. Sympathetic, gracious and conscientious, ESFJs are very concerned with the needs of others and eager to help in real and practical ways. Responsible, literal, and organized, ESFJs are bound by their sense of duty and commitment, and enjoy being active and cooperative members of committees and organizations. Highly sensitive to indifference, criticism or conflict, ESFJs are generally quite decisive, like to have things settled, and are known for expressing strong opinions based on their own personal experience or that of someone else they trust.

ESTP

ESTPs are typically charming, friendly, spontaneous, playful, and easy going people with great powers of observation and the ability to live completely "in the moment" at all times. They like to talk about what is real and concrete (their experiences, facts, current events, sports, etc.). ESTPs work well under pressure and are comfortable making last minute decisions. They can be good negotiators and tough, logical decision makers when necessary. Realistic and pragmatic, ESTPs tend to speak directly and clearly, responding best to people who are down-to-earth. They are prone to restlessness when the conversation gets too theoretical or when they are required to plan far ahead.

ISFJ

Sensitive, caring, patient, and conscientious, ISFJs are cautious about change, and take time to warm up to new ideas and people. Painstakingly accurate and methodical when working with facts and details, ISFJs are patient with follow-through tasks. They tend to take commitments and deadlines very seriously. ISFJs have excellent memories and are especially good at remembering details pertaining to people. They are patient listeners, eager to help people in real and practical ways. Quiet, private and reserved, ISFJs can take a while to get to know, but once they make a connection they are exceptionally loyal, generous and devoted.

ISTP

ISTPs are typically quiet, realistic, independent, and highly pragmatic people and come across as objective, even-tempered and unflappable in almost all situations. Often people of few words, ISTPs typically prefer to skip a lot of theoretical analysis or future predictions in favor of getting right to the bottom line and the relevant facts and figures. Direct, honest, and down-to-earth, ISTPs tend to be literal and explicit and dislike pretentious people or those with a hidden agenda. While ISTPs enjoy joking around, they are intensely private and do not appreciate those who pry. Often skeptical, ISTPs respond well to demonstrations and evidence of past success.

FIGURE 1 (continued).

